

Why are neighborhood business districts important?

Can malls and discount centers take the place of our neighborhood business districts in the future? The answer is most definitely no. Though malls and discount centers play an important role in our communities, neighborhood business districts are much more than shopping centers. It is critical for everyone involved in a neighborhood business district revitalization to understand the value of that district. Here are some good reasons why neighborhood business districts are important (not in order of importance):

1. Your neighborhood commercial district is a prominent employment center. Even the smallest neighborhood business district employs hundreds of people and is therefore a significant employer in the community—good jobs near where people live.
2. As a business center, your neighborhood commercial district plays a major role. It often serves as an incubator for new businesses—the successes of tomorrow.
3. Most of the businesses in your neighborhood commercial district are independently owned. They support a local family who supports the local schools, etc. Finally, independent businesses keep profits in town.
4. A neighborhood business district is a reflection of how your community sees itself—a critical factor in business retention, expansion, and recruitment efforts. When businesses begin looking at your area as a possible location, they examine many aspects including the

quality of life. If your neighborhoods do not support strong commercial business districts, that may reflect poorly on the quality of life in your neighborhood.

5. Your neighborhood business district represents a significant portion of the community's tax base. If this district declines, jobs will be lost and property values will decrease, subsequently increasing the tax burden on other parts of your community.
6. Your neighborhood business district is an indispensable shopping and service center. Though it may no longer hold the place as your community's most dominant shopping center, it still includes unique shopping and service opportunities. Attorneys, physicians, accountants, and insurance offices, as well as financial institutions, are often located in neighborhood business districts.
7. Your neighborhood business district is the core of your community's heritage. Many of the buildings are historically or architecturally significant, and help to highlight your community's legacy.
8. Neighborhood business districts represent a vast amount of public and private investment. Imagine the costs to recreate all the public infrastructure and buildings already existing in your commercial area. Think of the waste of past dollars spent if neighborhood business districts are neglected.
9. A neighborhood business district is often a major tourist draw. When people travel, they want to see unique places

with a sense of pride. There isn't a neighborhood business district like yours in the world!

11. And, perhaps, most important, your neighborhood business district provides a sense of community and place. As Carol Lifkind, author of *Main Street: The Face of Urban America*, said "...as Main Street, it was uniquely American, a powerful symbol of shared experiences, of common memory, of the challenge, and the struggle of building a civilization... Main Street was always familiar, always recognizable as the heart and soul of the village, town or city."

(Edited from an article by Alicia Goehring, Wisconsin Main Street Program, Wisconsin Department of Development.
